

## FACT Sheet

**Scientific Name:** Hypericum Perforatum

**Common Name:** St John's Wort

**Active Ingredients:** Hypericin & Xanthones

**Best-Selling Brands** (with the most active ingredient): VitaFit, Source Naturals, Vitamins.com.

**Historical Perspective:** Named after St John the Baptist (abundant on his birthday, June 24). Used in ancient times as a treatment for menstrual disorders and in the Middle Ages for anxiety and depression.

**Common Uses:** Used in the tea form as a nerve tonic, a diuretic, and for treatment of conditions such as insomnia and even gastritis. In the pill form, it is used for mild to moderate depression. Used in the oil form (red oil) to relieve inflammation, promote healing, and as a hemorrhoid treatment.

**Investigational Uses** (for specific medical conditions/diagnoses): AIDS: Investigation of the effect of hypericin in inactivating lipid containing retroviruses. -Ineffective  
CANCER: Investigation of the use of hypericin to induce cancer cell death. -Ineffective

**Common or Recommended Dosages:** 1-2 cups of the tea daily. 1-2 pills daily.

**Average Cost per Day:** Depends on amount of active ingredient. Prices I found ranged from \$13.00 (100caps-1-2 times/day) to \$17.75 (80 caps-1-2 pills/day) to \$14.95 (30 caps-2 pills/day).

Source Naturals \$12.78 (120caps-3 times/day), Vitamins.com \$8.37 (90caps-1-3 times/day)

**Potential Side Effects:** Photosensitivity (rare, with large doses), possible high blood pressure, gastrointestinal discomfort, fatigue, dizziness, itching, nausea, anxiety, dry mouth, and a skin rash.

**Food Drug Interactions:** Certain foods may react unfavorably with hypericin: Amino acids tryptophan and tyrosine, beer, coffee, wine, chocolate, fava beans, and salami.

**Contraindications to Use:** Should not be used if pregnant, or on antidepressants, diet pills, narcotics, or amphetamines.

Preparations of St John's Wort are inducers of various drug-metabolizing enzymes, resulting in a lessened therapeutic effect. It should not be taken with indinavir,

warfarin, cyclosporin, oral contraceptives, digoxin, and theophylline. (Committee on Safety of Medicines)

**Research Data on Safety and Efficacy** (both short-term and long-term use): A meta-analysis of 23 randomized trials, published in the British Medical Journal, found that hypericum, the active ingredient, was superior to the placebo and about as effective as standard antidepressants.

**Bottom-Line:** St John's Wort may be an effective treatment for mild to moderate depression but caution if you are on other medications and discontinue if side effects occur.

### References:

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2. St. John's Wort Side Effects and Warnings.  
<http://www.personalhealthzone.com/stjohnswort.html> accessed February, 2000.
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4. St John's Wort. <http://www.quackwatch.com/01QuackeryrelatedTopics/DSH/stjohnhtml>
5. Commonly Used Medicinal Herbs.  
<http://www.ama-assn.org/sci-pubs/journals/most/recent/issues/fami/fsa8005.htm>
6. Important Interactions Between St John's Wort (Hypericum Perforatum) preparations and Prescribed Medicines. Message From Professor A Breckenridge, Chairman, Committee On Safety Of Medicines. 29 February 2000.

2LT Jennifer Sherwood, U.S. Military Dietetic Internship, WRAMC, 23 May 00